

BLESSED BE GOD

[An STAB Work for Flute, Violin, and the Piano]

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A Commentary on Blessed Be God (Benedictus Prayer), set to Music by Roland Ntambang.

Introduction

The composition *Blessed Be God* draws its text from the “Canticle of Zechariah” (Luke 1:68–79), traditionally referred to as the Benedictus. This canticle emerges after the miraculous birth of John the Baptist and the restoration of Zechariah’s voice, forming one of the three principal canticles of Luke’s infancy narrative: the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, and the *Nunc Dimittis*. In Christian liturgy, the Benedictus holds a privileged position as the hymn for Lauds (Morning Prayer) within the Liturgy of the Hours.

While numerous simple and chant-like settings exist for liturgical use, the text has rarely been treated in polyphonic, concert-style settings comparable to those devoted to the *Gloria* or *Credo*. This gap provided both the motivation and creative impetus for my composition. By situating the Benedictus within a larger tradition of grand sacred works, I sought to elevate the prayer text into a formal, celebratory, and stylistically elaborate musical statement.

Earlier settings exist, most notably Charles Villiers Stanford’s Anglican works in his various Morning, Evening, and Communion Services (Opp. 10, 12, 81, 115), but they tend toward liturgical utility rather than concert performance. Thus, *Blessed Be God* consciously positions itself within a dual trajectory: rooted in Western classical sacred traditions, yet expanded with African rhythmic and cultural idioms to reflect both liturgical adaptability and cultural inclusivity.

General Structure

The composition is organized into four interconnected sections, modeled in part after Vivaldi’s *Gloria*. Each ritardando at the end of a section introduces the next, maintaining forward momentum without halting the music. Sustained accompaniment and alternating soli and a cappella parts ensure structural unity across the piece.

Section One: Acclamation of God’s Blessedness

This section serves as a jubilant proclamation, emphasizing God’s fidelity to His promises by raising up “a mighty Savior in the house of David.” Its musical texture underscores divine majesty and fulfillment of prophecy.

Section Two: Covenant Faithfulness and Wonder

Here, the focus shifts to the enduring nature of God's covenant. An interpolated exclamatory "Oh" heightens awe and wonder, musically reflected in shifts of mood and harmonic color.

Section Three: The Child and His Mission

The spotlight turns to John the Baptist, described in lullaby-like rhythms that recall childhood yet foreshadow mission. Contrapuntal writing here is playful and tender, yet dynamically structured to signify divine calling.

Section Four: Light and Peace

The final section reprises the theme of divine visitation, light shining in darkness, and peace. It functions as both theological climax and musical summation, culminating in an expansive "Amen" that unifies the work.

Musical Structure

Dominant formal strategies include aria (with modified da capo form) and duet chorus, interspersed with recitativo accompagnato. Unlike strict Baroque da capo arias, these sections prioritize textual progression and dramatic continuity. Sectional contrasts, intimate soloistic writing versus full choral grandeur—demonstrate dynamic range and thematic unity.

Cultural and Liturgical Setting

The composition is arranged for SATB choir, soloists, organ/piano, violin, and flute. Its stylistic foundation is Western classical, yet it consciously incorporates African rhythmic patterns as a theological and cultural statement.

African influence is evident in the opening rhythmic gestures, which imitate the communal call of a king's herald summoning villagers, here transformed into a summons to praise God. The dialogue of female and male voices mirrors African birth rituals, resonating with the Benedictus' theme of divine promise fulfilled. This fusion embodies the theology of liturgical adaptation, which emphasizes incarnating the liturgy within the cultural milieu of the people to foster active participation and awareness (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 1963; Chupungco, 2006; Arbuckle, 1990; Schineller, 1990).

Instrumentation and Expression

Flute and violin weave antiphonal lines contrasting and blending with organ/piano accompaniment, producing a meditative yet celebratory sonority. Expressive markings align with textual meaning: tempo increases for communal excitement, a cappella passages highlight holiness, and the final "Amen" crescendos from pianissimo to fortissimo, reinforcing the tension between contemplation and jubilation.

Tonal Structure

The tonal plan reflects stability and progression: opening in B-flat major, modulating to G minor, then G major, E-flat major, and finally returning to B major. This tonal journey mirrors the theological progression from covenant promise to fulfillment, mission, and ultimate peace.

Conclusion

Blessed Be God offers a rare concert-style treatment of the Benedictus, combining theological depth, structural rigor, and cultural inclusivity. Through the fusion of Western classical tradition and African rhythmic vitality, the work invites audiences into a shared liturgical and cultural experience—a hymn of ancient praise reimagined for today's generation.

Program Notes

Blessed Be God is a concert-style setting of the “Canticle of Zechariah” (Luke 1:68–79), traditionally known as the Benedictus. Emerging from Zechariah's restored voice after John the Baptist's birth, the text is central to Christian liturgy as the hymn for Lauds. While often sung in simple chant, it has rarely been treated with the grandeur of polyphonic sacred works. This composition elevates the Benedictus into a formal, celebratory musical statement, structured in four sections tracing a theological arc: proclamation, covenant faithfulness, vocation, and eschatological hope. Rooted in Western classical tradition yet enriched with African rhythmic idioms, the work symbolizes cultural inclusivity and liturgical adaptation.

References

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BLESSED BE GOD

Benedictus Prayer.

Roland Ntambang

Flute Lah is G **Moderato** ♩=100

Violin *mp* *p*

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

Piano/Organ **Moderato** ♩=100 *p*

1

f *pp* *p*

Bles - sed, Bles -

Bles - sed, Bles -

Bles - sed, Bles -

Bles - sed, Bles -

mf *p*

17 **Moderato** ♩=120

sed be the Lord

sed be the Lord

se sed m r m m

sed be the Lord

sed be the Lord

Moderato ♩=120

mf

25 **Accapella**

mf

Bles sed be the Lord.

mf

Bles sed be the Lord ble - ssed be the Lord

mf

Bles sed be the Lord,

mf

Bles sed be the Lord, Bless'd be the

34

the Lord, the God of I - srael Bless'ed, be the God of I - srael!
 God of I - srael, Bless'd be the God of I - srael!
 Bless'd be the Lord, the God of I - srael, of I - srael!
 Lord God, the God of I - srael Bless'ed, be the God of I - srael!

43

rit. **Moderato** ♩=100

p *rit.* **Moderato** ♩=100
mf

51

Tenor

He has vi - si - ted His peo - ple,

59

Sop d : r m : f r : d r : r :-
He has vi - si - ted His peo - ple,

p *mf*



67

mf d : r : m
and re-deem'd

Alto d : d l_i : se_i l_i : t_i l_i : l_i :- l_i : t_i : d
He has vi - si - ted His peo - ple, and re-deem'd

m : f : s
and re-deem'd

l_i : se_i : l_i
and re-deem'd

p *mf*

75 *f* *p* **Moderato** ♩=120

them, and re-deem'd them, and re-deem'd them.

them, re-deem'd them, and re-deem'd them.

them, and re-deem'd them, and re-deem'd them.

them, re-deem'd them and re-deem'd them.

p *mf*



83

p *mf* **Doh is G**

He has raised up for us

He has raised up for us

p *mf*

91

his ser- vant,
his ser- vant.
a migh-ty Sa- viour in the house of Da-vid his ser- vant.



98

as he pro- mised by the lips of ho- ly men, those who were his_ pro_ phets, his_ pro_ phets from of
as he pro mised by the lips of ho- ly men, pro- phets from of
pro - mised by the lips of ho- ly men, pro- phets from of
as he pro- mised by the lips of ho- ly men, pro - phets from of

105

old, a Sa-viour who would free us from our foes, from the hands of
 old, a Sa-viour who, would free us from our foes, from the hands of
 old, a Sa-viour who would free us from our foes, from the hands of
 old, who would free us from our foes, from the hands of



113

rit.

2

all who hate us.
 all who hate us.
 all who hate us.
 all who hate us.

120 Adagietto $\text{♩} = 72$

Musical score for measures 120-124. The score is in 4/4 time and G major. The tempo is Adagietto with a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 72$. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and a bass line. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 124.

125

Musical score for measures 125-129. The score is in 4/4 time and G major. The tempo is Adagietto with a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 72$. The vocal line has lyrics "Lah is, G" and "oh,". The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a bass line. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 129.

131

so His love for our fa - thers is ful - filled and His ho - ly co - ve - nant re mem - bered.

So His love for our fa - thers is ful - filled and His co - ve - nant re - mem - bered.

so His love for our fa - thers is ful - filled and His co - ve - nant re - mem - bered.

So His love for our fa - thers is ful - filled and His co - ve - nant re - mem - bered.



135

rit.

Andante ♩=76

rit.

Andante ♩=76

139

mp

Sop.:Solo *mf* s_i :- | d : m r . t_i : t_i d | : d

He swore to A - bra - ham our

Alto Solo *mf* d :-

our

mp *mp*

143

cresc. d :- | s :- | m :- | f :-

fa - ther to grant us, grant

cresc. : l_i | t_i : s_i | l_i : d | - : r

fa ther to grant us, grant

mp *f*

147

dim. s :- | - : r | r :- | : | : | : | : | :

us,

dim. d :- | - : t_i | t_i :- | : | : | : | : | :

us,

mf *f*

151

Tenor Solo

Bass Solo

that free from fear and saved...

That free from fear,

mf *mp*

156

Choir

Accapella

saved from the hands of our foes, of our foes, from, the hands of our foes, of our foes, We might serve

saved from the hands of our foes, of our foes, We might serve

mf

162

f

Him in ho - li - ness and ju - stice, all the days of our life in His pre - sence,

Him in ho - li - ness and ju - stice, all the days of our life in His pre - sence,

Him in ho - li - ness and ju - stice, all the days of our life in His pre - sence,

Him, in ho - li - ness and ju - stice, days of life His pre - sence,

mf

168

pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence, His pre -

pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence, His pre -

pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence, His pre -

pre - sence pre - sence in His pre - sence in His pre - sence, His pre -

173

sence.
sence.

f *mp*

177 rit. 3 Andante ♩=76

p *mf*

Andante ♩=76

182

f

187

mp

mp

Sop. Solo *mf* m : d , r | m , r : m , d
As for you lit-tle lit

Baritone Solo *mf* d : d | : d
As for you

mp

==

192

mf

s : - , l | s , f : m , r | d : s | : d | t , , d : t , , l | t , : s | s : m , f | s , f : s , m
tle lit tle lit tle child, you shall be called, be called a pro-phet of God, of God the

mf

t , , d : t , , l | t , : s | l , , t , : d , r | m , r : m , d | s : - , f | s , f : m , r | d : d | : d
lit tle lit tle child, lit - tle child you shall be called be called a pro phet of

mp

196

Most High. You shall go a-head of the Lord to pre-pare his ways be
 God the Most High. You shall go a-head a-head of the Lord To



200

fore him to make known to his peo-ple their sal-va-tion through for-give-ness of all their sins.
 make known to His peo-ple their sal-va-tion through for-give-ness of all their sins.

204

Choir m : d r | m , r : m , d
 As for you lit-tle lit
 for you lit-tle
 As for you

209

tle lit-tle lit tle child, you shall be called, be called a pro-phet of God, of God the
 child, lit-tle child, you shall be called a pro-phet of God the
 oh lit-tle child, you shall be called, a pro-phet of God,
 lit-tle lit-tle child, lit-tle child you shall be called be called a pro-phet of

213

Most High. You shall go a-head of the Lord to pre-pare his ways be
 the Most High. You shall go a-head of the Lord. To
 God the Most High. You shall go a-head a-head of the Lord. To

217

fore him to make known to his peo-ple their sal-va-tion through for-give-ness of all their sins.
 make known to His peo-ple their sal-va-tion through for-give-ness of all their sins.
 make known to His peo-ple their sal-va-tion through for-give-ness of all their sins.
 make known to His peo-ple their sal-va-tion through for-give-ness of all their sins.

221 rit. 4 Moderato ♩=120

rit. Moderato ♩=120

227

And so, the lo-ving kind-ness,
 And so, and so, lo-ving kind-ness

235

the lo-ving kind-ness of the heart of our God.

the lo-ving kind-ness of the heart of our God.

the lo-ving, lo-ving kind-ness of the heart of our God.

lo-ving kind-ness of our God of our God, kind-ness of the heart of our God.

244

Who vi-sits us like the dawn, who vi-sit us like the dawn from

us like the dawn, who vi-sit us like the dawn from

who vi-sits us like the dawn, who vi-sit us, like the dawn from

us like the dawn, who vi-sit us, like the dawn from

253

p
f : : l : s : f : : r : m : - : - : m : - : : *mf* m : s : : d' : : s : : | l : l : r : : *p* m : f : m : - :
 on high, He will, give light to those in dark ness
f : : d : t : l : l : s : s : i : - : - : s : i : - : : : : f : m m : : l : f f : : d : t : l : l : d : - :
 on high, He will give, give light to, those in dark ness
f : : r : m r : - : - : d : - : - : d : - : : s : s : : l : d' : : f : f : f : : s : l : l : - :
 on high, He will, give light to those in dark ness
r : - : - : s : i : - : - : d : - : - : d : - : : : : d : d d : : f : f : f : f : : l : t : l : d : s : l : l : - :
 on high, He will give, give light to, those in dark ness

mf
mf 3
mp
 those who dwell in the sha-dow of death, and guide
m : d : m r : t : d l : d : t : l : l : - : - : : : : : : : : : : : : d : d
 those who dwell in the sha-dow of death, and guide
d : m : s s : f : m f : l : f m : - : - : : : : : : : : : : : : s : l
 those who dwell in the sha-dow of death, and guide
d : l : m : s : l : l : - : - : r : d : s : l : l : - : - : : : : : : : : : : : : d : l : l
 those who dwell in the sha-dow of death, and guide

286

rall. rit.

mp p ppp

A men

A men

A men

A men

A men

A men

mp p

293

pp

Fine!

ff

f

A men

A men

A men

A men

A men

pp mf f